

FLORIDA

# History & the Arts

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## The Kingsley Plantation

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA • LEU GARDENS • SPRING TRAINING AND SUPER BOWLS





# THE KINGSLEY PLANTATION SLAVERY IN SPANISH FLORIDA

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By Kiley Mallard

For 6,000 years, humans have made Fort George Island in present-day Jacksonville their home. Still visible today are giant mounds of oyster shells left by the Timucua Indians and their ancestors. The Kingsley Plantation



sits on the northern end of the island, overlooking the Fort George River. Built in 1798



KELLY LADUKE/NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

KITCHEN IN FOREGROUND, MAIN HOUSE IN BACK.

by the slaves of John McQueen, the house is the oldest planter's residence still standing in Florida. The semi-circle of 25 tabby cabins (originally 32)

just south of the house provides one of the most intact examples of slave life in the state.

On July 21, 1791, the Spanish government granted Fort George Island to John McQueen, who harvested the abundant island timber and sold it in St. Augustine. In 1804, when high tides destroyed his sawmill, McQueen sold Fort George Island to John Houston McIntosh.



EASTER BARTLEY, BORN AT KINGSLEY PLANTATION.

FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES



## Kingsley Plantation is part of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve operated by the National Park Service.

The McIntosh family prospered, growing Sea Island cotton with the help of 160 to 170 slaves. In 1811-12, McIntosh participated in the Patriot Rebellion. The rebels planned to seize Florida from Spain for the United States, with the expectation of generous land grants in return. In 1812, they captured land between the St. Marys and St. Johns Rivers, but an attempt to capture St. Augustine turned into a stalemate. The U.S. withdrew support, the Seminole Indians (allied with Spain) attacked the Patriots, and the brief rebellion ended. McIntosh fled to Georgia, and rented Fort George Island to a man named Zephaniah Kingsley.

Born in England in 1765, Zephaniah Kingsley moved to Charleston, South Carolina in the 1770s. In 1790, Kingsley began sailing to Africa and the Caribbean, profiting from slavery. He came to Spanish East Florida in 1803, purchasing a 2,600-acre complex of plantations along the St. Johns River, near present day Orange Park. Kingsley soon brought his wife, Anna Madgigine Jai, and their three children to live in Florida.

Anna was born in Senegal, Africa and sold into slavery as a teenager. She was purchased by Kingsley in Havana, Cuba, and married him at age 13 in an African ceremony. On March

1, 1811, Kingsley freed Anna and their three children. By 1813, Anna owned five acres across the St. Johns River from Kingsley's plantation. She purchased goods, livestock—and slaves. During the Patriot Rebellion, she burned down her house and Kingsley's property, rather than have it occupied by Patriots. The Spanish government rewarded her loyalty with a land grant of 350 acres.

In 1814, the Kingsley family and 60 slaves moved to Fort George Island. Sea Island cotton was still the staple crop for the plantation, but the Kingsleys grew other crops to make the plantation self-sufficient. Kingsley purchased the island in 1817. Whenever he was away, Anna was responsible for the Fort George Island plantation.

In the 1820s, 32 tabby cabins were built in a semi-circle less than a quarter mile south of the plantation house. Tabby, a mix of lime (produced by burning the oyster shells from the Indian mounds on the island), sand, water and whole oyster shells, was also used in construction of the barn and kitchen.

Slaves on the Kingsley Plantation were managed according to the "task system," popular on the southeast coast where rice and Sea Island cotton were grown. (Inland





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MAIN PLANTATION HOUSE, CA. 1870S

*Anna Madgigine*



KINGSLEY PLANTATION/NPS COLLECTION

PALMETTO AVENUE BY JOHN BARKER, 1888.

The first  
Kingsley Heritage  
Celebration was  
a 1998 family  
reunion, the  
idea of Manuel  
Lebron, a  
descendant  
of Anna and  
Zephaniah  
Kingsley.

states, which grew sugar and tobacco, more often used the "gang system.") Under the task system, each slave was assigned a specific amount of work each day. When tasks were completed, their time was their own. Slaves had their own gardens, and grew crops to supplement their meager rations, or to be sold or traded for what they needed. Slave marriages were not recognized by law. Children belonged to the mother's owner. Families were often separated, and infant mortality was high.

The Kingsley slave quarters were excavated in 1968, 1981 and 2006. At the site, archaeologists have found tools for gardening, hunting, fishing and cooking, as well as clay pipes, clay marbles, a harmonica, a toothbrush, a brass bell and a glass inkwell.

In 1821, the United States purchased Florida from Spain. The rights of both freed and enslaved blacks changed dramatically. Fear of slave rebellion contributed to laws restricting the rights of all blacks. Kingsley was against these laws, arguing that treating slaves humanely would ensure a peaceful continuation of the institution. In 1823, he was appointed to the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida, where he hoped to persuade the territorial government to create more tolerant laws. He published, "A Treatise on the Patriarchal or Co-operative System of Society As It Exists in Some Governments...Under the Name of Slavery," in 1828. Kingsley's efforts were unsuccessful, and by the late 1820s there was little difference between free and enslaved blacks in Florida.



COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SLAVE CABINS, LATE 19TH CENTURY.



Anna gave birth to the couple's youngest son in 1824 under these new restrictive laws. Fearing for his family's safety, Kingsley sent Anna and their two sons to Haiti in 1837. Called the "Isle of Liberty," Haiti was the first independent black republic in the New World. There the Kingleys established a plantation they called *Mayorasgo De Koka*. More than 50 of the Kingsley slaves came with them as indentured servants (slavery was against the law in Haiti.) The slaves were promised freedom and land in exchange for nine years of service.

When Zephaniah Kingsley died in 1843, his white relatives contested his will in an attempt to disinherit the black heirs, including Anna and their children. The will was upheld. Their younger son, John, took over the Haitian plantation, and Anna moved back to the States to live with her daughters in Jacksonville.

During the Civil War, Anna and her daughters supported the Union. Florida's secession forced them to move briefly to New York, then to Union-occupied Fernandina. Anna returned to the St. Johns River after the war, where she died in 1870.

There are no photos or portraits of Anna Madgigine Jai, no personal letters or diaries. Her life story has been pieced together through legal petitions, official correspondence, and probate and property records. Her signature exists because of these documents. Though she is believed to be buried in Jacksonville, her gravesite is unknown.

Today, Kingsley Plantation is part of the Timucuan



DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Ecological and Historic Preserve operated by the National Park Service. Admission is free. Visitors can explore the grounds, which include the slave quarters, barn, waterfront, plantation house, kitchen house and interpretive garden. A visitor contact station and bookstore are located in a 1920s structure adjacent to the plantation buildings. Currently, the plantation house is undergoing stabilization for damage caused by termite infestations, and is closed to the public.

Each February, Kingsley Plantation hosts Black History Month events. Each October, the Kingsley Heritage Celebration takes place. The first Kingsley Heritage Celebration was a 1998 family reunion, the idea of Manuel Lebron, a descendant of Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley. Ranger programs are offered daily at 2:00 p.m. and field trips are encouraged. Teachers can download curriculum from the park's Web site. 🏠



KELLY LADUKE/NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



To Learn More  
Visit the Kingsley  
Plantation at 11676  
Palmetto Avenue  
in Jacksonville, call  
904.251.3537 or visit  
[www.nps.gov/timu](http://www.nps.gov/timu).